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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 000155

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E.O. 12958: DECL: TEN YEARS

TAGS: PGOV PREL PINR EC

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S MEETING WITH VICE PRESIDENT MORENO

Classified By: DCM Jefferson Brown for reasons 1.4 (b&d)

¶1. (C) Summary: The Ambassador paid a courtesy call on Vice President Lenin Moreno on January 17. Moreno demonstrated his good humor, openness to the U.S. and conveyed a sincere desire to improve coordination of GOE social programs, his core interest and assignment. He also made an impassioned defense of the need for a new constitution improving the welfare of Ecuadorians. Moreno impressed us as a useful partner and potential advocate for many of our development assistance programs. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met at our request with VP Moreno in his office, still empty of any papers or personal effects, as he clearly has only just started to settle in. She was accompanied by the DCM. He was accompanied by Maria Sol Corral, introduced as having responsibility for the office's public relations, but it appeared that she is also acting more informally in a role akin to chief of staff.

¶3. (SBU) Moreno, well-known since the shooting accident that crippled him for his motivational speaking advocating humor to confront adversity, characteristically opened with a joke. He noted that President Correa would be departing that evening for the MERCOSUR summit, and they had just met to review pending issues. "My first action as acting President will be to sign the FTA," he said with a laugh.

¶4. (SBU) Moreno welcomed the visit and expressed his admiration for the United States. He sees Americans as a respectful, inclusive society, with a generous spirit and great work ethic. Clearly familiar with the U.S. from many visits, he noted that his three daughters (ranging in ages from 19 to mid-20's) all have lived there either currently or previously and are very American-oriented. As a person confined to a wheelchair, he particularly admires the U.S. sensitivity and inclusive approach to people with physical challenges, unmatched by any other country.

¶5. (C) He said that Ecuador had to get past its cultural inclination to always play the "blame game" with respect to its problems, which so often includes blaming the U.S. for one thing or another. As a nation, beginning with each citizen, we have to build up our self-esteem and sense of accountability, he said.

¶6. (C) Asked about his priorities as Vice President, Moreno said he saw himself filling an "umbrella" supervisory role for various functions of government. He wants to focus on boosting science and technology investments, which Ecuador sorely lacks (as VP he is the titular head of the National Science Council). He again cited the U.S. as a model, with respect to government-private sector partnerships in this

field. He wants to work with Ecuadorian companies to develop a similar ethic. "Rafael doesn't agree," he said, referring to the President and his low regard for the national business community, "but I think I can convince him." He also wants to help Correa's plans to boost productivity, including widening the micro-credit sector. He noted that economic development was the key, ultimately, to reducing out-migration to the United States and other countries. He also underscored the importance of the fight against corruption.

¶7. (C) Moving to what will probably be his main focus, Moreno explained that he would be establishing a National Secretariat of Solidarity to better coordinate various social

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programs. He emphasized that he would be more a coordinator than implementor working with other government elements. He spoke with passion about the need to attend better to the country's most disadvantaged populations. He cited specifically the handicapped, AIDS patients, and at-risk youth -- including the children who live with incarcerated mothers in Ecuadorian jails. The Ambassador took advantage of the opening to raise cooperation on TIP, to consolidate recent gains, and he responded supportively. She also told him of frustrations felt at times by voluntary U.S. humanitarian organizations stymied by Ecuadorian bureaucracy when they wanted to make equipment donations or conduct medical missions, and he promised to look for a way to streamline that process.

¶8. (C) Moreno also made an impassioned defense of the need for a new constitution that would be more focused on the welfare of the population. He clearly is convinced this is a necessary reform that will be key to the process of "recovering dignity" for the citizenry, as he described it.

¶9. (C) Comment: Moreno conveys a mature, serene demeanor and a genuine commitment to making a positive difference for his country. While not one of Correa's top political advisors, he seems to enjoy good access and to have developed the President's respect. We expect him to be a moderating influence on the administration. He will be a useful partner and advocate for many of our development assistance programs, and he will likely also be a useful and strategic conduit for political messages that may be difficult to deliver directly to Correa.

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